

QUEST TEST

Meridian 104

Here is a tuner which I would expect every possible care had been taken to preserve the audio quality of the signal and I am glad to say that in many ways the 104 came up to my expectations. The frequency response was extremely flat, the distortion low and the cross talk more than adequate. So audibly I would expect this tuner to be very acceptable.

On the negative side, however, its sensitivity was only slightly better than average, although this should not present any problems providing the aerial is giving a strong signal. Only six pre-set stations can be accommodated with no manual tuning, which seemed a shame. But having said this, I would suspect that the thinking behind the design was based on the high quality reception that is available from Radio 2, 3 and 4, plus a couple of local stations. The muting was, in my opinion, set a little low, especially on stereo where I would have preferred to have seen it set to the 50dB signal to noise level, say 90uV.

As many owners of Meridian tuners, reading this review may be confused by a seemingly poor signal to noise ratio, I should point out that the specification is measured with a deviation of 75kHz while we opted for the DIN standard of 40kHz. Although this lower level of modulation places extra demands on the tuner, I believe it to be more relevant with modern broadcasting standards.

But I liked the tuner, as it was extremely small, neat and performed well, albeit on limited facilities. MJ

Listening tests

Finally, we arrive at our British contestant, and it is one we have been trying to get for review for some time now. The Meridian 104 sells for just under £260, and is therefore the most expensive tuner in the test. And yet it is the smallest and appears to have the least to offer in terms of facilities.

Well, as we know appearances can be deceptive. It does not bristle with facilities, I agree, but the Sony only betters it with eight pre-sets instead of the Meridian's six. I would certainly criticise the 104 for having only six pre-sets, because even in London you can pick up seven FM stations. An FM tuner should be able to accommodate at least eight I feel to cover all UK eventualities.

Apart from this omission, the Meridian offers all that the UK user could ask for in my view. Aerial input is via a standard 75ohm co-ax socket, and audio output is via a five-pin DIN socket. A DIN-DIN connecting lead is supplied, but this is only useful if you are using the 104 with a Meridian 101 pre-amp due to its shortness. Another moan is that no co-ax plug is provided. One has a right to expect one for £260 I feel.

Front panel of the 104 is pretty bare. Rotary control on the right switches the unit on and selects the pre-set stations. The two toggle switches on the left select muting, mono, and tuning. The right hand switch is the tune



Meridian 104

Test Results

Test	Revox	Akai	Marantz	Meridian	Sony
Signal to noise					
75KHz, Stereo for 30dB S/N	2.6uV	8.5uV	10uV	3.5uV	7.5uV
75KHz Stereo for 50dB S/N	26.0uV	75.0uV	175.0uV	36uV	50.0uV
40KHz Stereo for 30dB S/N	6.0uV	11.0uV	12.0uV	7uV	8.5uV
40KHz Stereo for 50dB S/N	60.0uV	110.0uV	250.0uV	90uV	80.0uV
75KHz Mono for 50dB S/N	2.6uV	1.8uV	7.0uV	2.5uV	1.5uV
AM Rejection					
Signal to noise					
40KHz dev 1mV RF	-69dB	-55dB	-58dB	-52dB	-60dB
Cross talk. Wide bandwidth	-41dB	-45dB	-41dB	-45dB	-46dB
Limiting	0.75uV	0.90uV	2.6uV	2uV	1.5uV
Distortion at 40KHz Dev	0.03%	0.03%	0.28%	0.07%	0.07%*
Spurious signal response	-106dB*	-110dB*	-98dB*	n/a	-100dB*
Image response	106dB*	110dB*	60dB*	74dB*	95dB*
Output impedance Fixed O/P	235 ohms	1.9K	1K	103 ohms	540 ohms
Recommended load	10K	20K**	10K	2K+***	****
Output voltage. Fixed	1.1V	480mV	530mV	440mV	740mV

*Manufacturer's specification: ** N/A but 20k+ should do
N/A but 2k+ should do: * N/A but 6k+ should do

switch. With this switch in the up position the meter indicates which station is being tuned in, and with it in the down position, the meter acts as a centre-tune type tuning accuracy meter.

Tuning in the pre-sets was very easy, which is more than can be said for the complex procedures one has to follow with most Japanese tuners with their computerised memories. It took me minutes to set one pre-set on the Sony ST-J75, in which time I had set all six on the Meridian. The lack of a signal strength meter was not serious since the stereo light will not operate on signals too weak to produce satisfactorily noise-free reception.

Adding the 104 proved a pleasure. There was no doubt whatsoever that whether off-air or using the disc source, the Meridian 104 was head and shoulders in front of its nearest competitor in this test, which was the Sony ST-J75.

Dynamic range was far better, and using 'Romeo & Juliet' off Dire Straits' latest album, the whole track just held together so much more convincingly. Vocals were more natural, drum transients crisper and fine detail such as rimshots stood out so much

more. Low level piano also stood out where it was just occasionally audible on the ST-J75. It was really like chalk and cheese. And when I say that the ST-J75 is probably the best Japanese tuner I have heard to date, you will appreciate just how good the Meridian 104 is. The 104 did not however, receive France on the 88.7MHz, whereas the ST-J7 did.

But is it worth all of its £260? To ascertain this it was necessary to compare it with one of my favourite mid-priced tuners, the Sugden T48II. No Japanese tuner I have tried has yet beaten the T48II, so it seemed a worthwhile comparison.

I am pleased to report that the Meridian made the Sugden T48II seem a little thin and not as coherent. Dynamic range was also improved on the Meridian, which simply had a more convincing and authoritative sound stage. I can say that the Meridian 104 is certainly worth the extra £100 for the gains in real sound quality. (Please note that what is said for T48II can also be taken as applying for R51II).

I still feel that not even the ST-J75 quite matches the sheer sound quality of the Sugden. However the T48II is now my second choice, after the Meridian 104.